Name of Provider: [St Mellitus College Trust]
UKPRN: [10030776]

TEF Year Four provider submission – St Mellitus College

Provider Context

St Mellitus College has experienced remarkable life and growth since its establishment 12 years ago and is one of the most innovative and exciting places to study theology, ministry and mission in the UK. We offer non-residential part-time and full-time context-based training in theology and ministry, preparing students for ordained, Reader (LLM) and lay ministries in the Church of England and for leadership positions in other churches. We have over 700 students studying across our four teaching centres (with a fifth due to open in September 2019), which includes more than 300 Church of England ordinands in training, over 200 undergraduate and postgraduate students following accredited programmes, and a number of people engaging with our non-accredited courses in theology. Our vision is to offer theological education and training set in the context of prayer and worship. Our training model combines academic excellence, a focus on missional leadership, the shaping of Christian character, and the flexibility to fit around busy lifestyles.

Historically, theological colleges have tended to follow a residential training model. However, St Mellitus has pioneered the context-based model, where students engage in front-line ministry at the same time as their academic studies. Supported by our training centres across the country, this approach allows students who do not wish to move away from their current ministry context to access market-leading theological training.

Our approach to theological training is proving-popular with our students and is well regarded across both the Higher Education Sector and throughout the Church of England. Our students also report high levels of satisfaction as seen in the results of the recent National Student Survey where we scored 95.96% in overall student satisfaction as an institution, and amongst our largest cohort, full time BA level students, we achieved 100% student satisfaction. We scored over 90% in twelve of the questions, with 31 out of the 35 questions/subject areas coming in above the national average.

Evidence of the College's standing with the Quality Assurance Agency is evidenced by the recent Higher Education Review from 2017, which identified three areas of Good Practice:

- The comprehensive arrangements for personal, academic and professional support provided to students through the Formation Group system, which is integral to the College's ethos.
- The tiered approach to the provision of study skills, which supports effective student transition and development
- The comprehensive and systematic use made of the virtual learning environment to ensure highly effective College-wide access to institutional information.

The Church of England's Ministry Council, who oversees the standards across theological colleges across the UK, identified a number of areas for Commendation in their Periodic External Report (PER) including:

- articulation of 'generous orthodoxy' and for the exceptional understanding of this demonstrated by staff, students and stakeholders.
- the Beginning Theology programme and its widening of access to study and training.
- the proactive approach to develop a more diverse staff body.
- building community in the different environments where students meet.

- fostering an ethos where the staff model an integrated and missional spirituality and theology.

- responsive and flexible in developing its structures to meet the changing needs of the organisation.
- a strong sense of strategic direction and desire for continuous improvement.
- its financial management and reporting.
- excellent provision of chaplains and counsellor throughout the course, and particularly on the residentials.
- responsiveness to student feedback.
- high quality of pastoral care offered to students.
- commitment to staff development and the opportunities for staff research for full-time staff.

With such positive affirmation from students and our external quality assurance bodies, the College is well placed to continue to maintain its excellent standards.

Teaching Quality

Our TEF Core Metric score of 95.2% for "[t]he teaching on my course" indicates strong student support for the construction and delivery of our curriculum. Our students are invited to partner with us in the design and delivery of our programmes. Every student at the College is consulted as part of the module evaluation process, providing feedback on their experience of a module, including teaching, learning, assessment, and resources available. This provides the raw data that helps shape the discussions at Management Committee, a student-staff consultative committee where students from each programme and cohort are appointed to represent their peers.

Broader student feedback on student experience is gathered through the End of Year Survey, the New Student Survey, and the National Student Survey. Data and trends from each of these sources are reviewed at the Management Committee with student representatives, as well as by the Academic and Centres Working Groups, and the Management Team. Actions are agreed during this process and reported back to the wider student body through the VLE. We also consult students when we create new modules to help ensure teaching is tailored to subjects that are relevant to the situations our students are encountering in their ministry.

The effectiveness of these feedback mechanisms is demonstrated by our NSS results for the following two questions, both of which scored 93.94% satisfaction: "Staff value students' views and opinions about the course" and "I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course".

A 98.99% NSS score for "[s]taff are good at explaining things" indicates how the College is committed to employing lecturers who are pedagogically excellent. We are proud that our teaching staff are engaged in church ministry (of various types, and in various contexts) alongside their teaching and are able to draw on their current professional practice and direct first-hand experience to support their teaching methods.

Academic staff are committed to research-led teaching, with many research-active in publication. The College is committed to development of its academic faculty. Staff have regular research leave to ensure engagement with current research in their field as well as access to book and conference allowances. Further, all teaching staff are peer-reviewed annually with best practice shared across the College. This process ensures consistency is maintained in learning outcomes and expectations, whilst still allowing staff freedom to develop their own personal style and approach. Finally, staff development is offered through the Durham University Learning and Teaching Award (DELTA), a professional development course accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA).

Successful completion of the course confers the right to apply to gain Associateship of the HEA and the post-nominal letters AHEA, which some of our teaching staff hold.

The College is currently undertaking a research project the theological underpinnings of one of its core founding values: 'Generous Orthodoxy'. This multi-year funded project will comprise a number of public lectures, a colloquium bringing together theologians from across the world to share their ideas on the topic and will result in two published books.

Learning Environment

The learning environment at St Mellitus is innovative amongst theological colleges. Because of the changes brought to theological education through this new model of context-based training, where students have the opportunity apply learning directly to placement experience, this has created a dynamic learning environment where theology and practice are in constant dialogue. The placements offer an opportunity to develop career focused skills, gain relevant practical experience, and embed theoretical knowledge in up to date praxis, helping our students develop as reflective practitioners. Intentional links are made between the academic and practical sides of study in the form of assessed portfolios based on placement activities and assignments requiring students to reflect on their practice theologically.

In order to support the students through this time of personal development, we provide significant formational support, what the QAA described as "comprehensive arrangements for personal, academic and professional support provided to students through the Formation Group system, which is integral to the College's ethos… alongside the tiered approach to the provision of study skills, which supports effective student transition and development". Students also have access to pastoral support in the form of chaplains and a College counsellor, the provision of which was described as "excellent" in our review by the Church of England.

Our students are also supported with digital resources, in the form of E-books, core reading and audio recordings of lectures, made available through Moodle, the College's virtual learning environment. The 2017 HER Report from QAA commended the college on: "The comprehensive and systematic use made of the virtual learning environment to ensure highly effective College-wide access to institutional information". Moodle is also a hub for learning resources beyond articles, chapters and books. Each module has a dedicated page which sets out session titles and bibliographies in addition to module details, such as learning outcomes. Core reading is given for each lecture, and a digital copy of this reading is always provided. As the module progresses, handouts, presentations, and audio recordings of lectures are often available to students for the purposes of reviewing and consolidating learning.

Our internal End of Year Survey enables every student to be heard with both quantitative scores and qualitative comments giving detailed feedback on all aspects of College life and culture. Since the survey's inception, student feedback has been largely positive. We have set ourselves a target of a 50% response rate on all internal surveys, which we have exceeded on the surveys occurring in the 2017-18 academic year. The fact that over half of our student body engages with each survey, despite not being offered any incentive to do so, beyond making their voice heard, is evidence that the students feel that they are being listened too, and that real and substantive change will occur in response to any concerns they raise.

We encourage students to take active responsibility for ensuring the St Mellitus culture is passed down to newer students, through our peer mentoring and "buddy" system, where experienced students meet with the first years and guide them through their transition into College life.

While measuring the effectiveness of our attempts to create a learning environment that truly models inclusion and involvement of all students is difficult to do, we would point to two key statistics – our NSS scores for Learning Opportunities, and Learning Community, and perhaps most pertinently, our continuation rate.

Learning Opportunities:
My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth. 96.97%

My course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics.	97.98%
My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt.	84.85%

Learning Community:	
I feel part of a community of staff and students.	93.94%
I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course.	91.92%

As recorded in our TEF core metrics and in our more recent iteration of the HESA AP 2017-18 Student Return, out of 512 registered student instances, we only had 4 students who ended their studies for reasons that were not the successful completion of the course.

Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

Across our BA programmes, our commitment to the academic attainment of all students is demonstrated through every one of our 2018 graduating class attained at least a 2:2, with over 70% of students gaining a 2:1 or first-class degree. Average attainment was almost identical for male and female students, and consistent across age groups, which speaks to our success in ensuring equality of opportunity through the design and delivery of our programmes. Attainment across our MA programme was also consistently high, with 5 of our 35 MA 2018 Graduates gaining distinctions.

Our TEF core metrics indicate 98.9% of students recorded in employment or further study and 96.6% in highly skilled employment or further study. The non-core metrics of the DLHE also make for very positive reading, with UNISTATS recording the post-graduation earnings of our BA (hons) Theology Ministry and Mission students as being 26% higher than the average salary for those taking a similar course. This is evidence that the skills learnt through our training model are producing highly sought-after graduates, with a significant competitive advantage in the jobs market. This helps our graduates to find the right jobs for them, with 66% of respondents to the DLHE Survey able to select the main reason for taking their current job as “it was exactly the type of work I wanted”.

In recent years, we have invested dedicated resources into supporting employability with specific sessions offered on how to write CVs, good interview practice, and a careers panel. As previously discussed, our context-based learning model provides extensive opportunities for students to develop experience and skills directly related to full time church ministry or charitable work, the area where over 80% of our last years employed graduates are working. The success in preparing students for employment is demonstrated by 78.6% of respondents answering “Well” or “Very Well” to the DLHE question: “How well did your recent course prepare you for employment?”

After graduating, our alumni are supported through the alumni support network, which focuses on improving long term student outcomes through building networks and signposting alumni towards opportunities for continuing professional development. This ensures they remain equipped for mission and ministry within their various contexts.